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Introduction to Pocket Guide 6

Learner Preparation

Lesson 14:

Saddling your horse

Lesson 15:

Lateral flexion and tossing the rein over
your horse's head *from the ground*

Lesson 16:

Mounting and dismounting
The Emergency Dismount

Lesson 17:

Lateral flexion and tossing the rein over
your horse's head *from the saddle*



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POCKET GUIDE 6



Partnership
Level

Pocket Guide 6

Level 1 Freestyle Riding Skills

Lessons 14-17

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Introduction to Pocket Guide 6

You are ready to begin the next and final stage of your *Level 1 Program*. Everything you have learned to this point on the ground will now be focused on skills and tasks related to riding.

You will be introduced to the concept of the "Four Savvys" in the Parelli Program. In the ground skills *Pocket Guides* the lessons focused on two of the Savvys – *On Line* and a little taste of *Liberty*. Now you will begin your preparations for the third Savvy – *Freestyle Riding*.

In the *Preparation for Level 2 Guide*, that you start when you complete the following lessons, you will expand on this third Savvy. Then in *Level 2* you will expand greatly on all three of these Savvys and be prepared for the fourth – *Finesse Riding*.

If you have successfully reached this stage in *Level 1* we can predict that you will likely continue on as a long term student. So, now you should know just how much instruction and support is available to you.

While you progress through the lessons in these *Pocket Guides* you can, and should, be doing lessons to expand your ground skills, both *On Line* and *Liberty*, by progressing to the *Level 2 Program*. This will keep you and your horse

interested, curious and moving in the right direction while you do the *Level 1 Freestyle Riding* lessons.

By the end of the *Level 1 Freestyle Riding* lessons you will be able to:

- Teach your horse to stand still to accept saddling,
- Saddle your horse with savvy,
- Be safe when mounting and dismounting,
- Teach your horse to give to one side with the rein (*Lateral Flexion*) both on the ground and while in the saddle – like testing your brakes.
- Understand the basics of go and whoa and have taken the first steps toward developing a truly independent seat so you can learn to ride like you are part of the horse.

Some people think this is just basics for beginners when in fact, they are the most important principles of getting horses ready to accept a human on his back, not to mention lessons in behavior shaping.

Real safety with horses comes when the horse truly accepts you and follows your leadership first on the ground and then on his back.

Let's get into it!

Learner preparation

Reading assignment

Please read about "*The Four Savvys*," "*The Parelli Pathway*," "*Natural Riding Dynamics*," and "*Saddle Savvy*" in your *Theory Guide* while you are progressing through these lessons.

Viewing assignment

Play DVD-5, Chapter 2, and watch the segments with Linda and her *Level 1* class titled, "*Preparation For Riding - Part 1.*" If you have a Western saddle, watch the segment with Pat titled "*Cinch Savvy*" at the end of this Chapter.

When you are done viewing this Chapter, return here.

Lesson 14: Saddling your horse

Saddling is an aspect of *The Friendly Game*^{#1} so you need to teach your horse how to act like a partner standing still and confident for you to saddle.

At the very least, most horses have never been 'introduced' to the saddle, nor allowed to smell it or nudge it to check it out. Horses that cannot stand still while being saddled and girth-proud or cinchy horses are often the result. It's not necessarily what's been done to them, it's

what has not been done for them.

Many horses are afraid of their saddle because they've never been allowed to make friends with it and because of the way the saddle is lifted on to them. Blindfolding a horse for the first few times he is saddled is not an uncommon practice in conventional horse breaking methods, which does nothing to build confidence, and everything to build fear.

Objectives

- ★ To teach your horse to accept that the saddle is not harmful: "*trust me, trust my toys!*"
- ★ To be able to saddle your horse without tying him up in any way (especially not cross ties because it forces the horse to comply rather than you "asking" him to).

Tools

 Halter, 12-foot Line, Saddle and Pad.

Directions for introducing your horse to the saddle

Teach your horse to find the saddle...

First of all you might play the *Seven Games* near your saddle without requiring him to even notice it, and if he does you should act like it wasn't your intention (remember

that direct line stuff doesn't work with horses!).

Next, play *The Squeeze Game*^{#7} between you and the saddle and pad, starting with a wide gap and gradually reducing it.

Finally, use *The Driving Game*^{#3} and get your horse to put his nose on the saddle. Allow him to find comfort there by resting and pretty soon he'll get over any apprehension he might have and start investigating it.

Don't hurry your horse. Allow him to smell the saddle for as long as he likes. If you are worried about him pawing or biting it (there is a real chance of this) put it up off the ground, or preferably have a saddle or pad you wouldn't be upset over if it got a few scratches. It'll pay off for the horse.



If your horse doesn't want to approach it or smell it, simply play more *Squeeze Games* without worrying about it. Pretend it's a bucket, or a towel hanging on the fence, that should be your "attitude."

The more you want to make him smell it, the more he won't want to. The principle of "reverse psychology" with prey animals comes in here. Act like it's not important and

he'll start to get more curious.

Horses are so attuned to pressure that they can react negatively just by feeling your strong intention. Try this: if it happens today, great! If it doesn't, well, we'll just play around each day until it's his idea to investigate.

Pick up the saddle pad and allow your horse to smell it while you hold it. Don't push it into his space, just allow him to reach forward to smell it. If he ignores it or won't smell it, this will tell you he may be afraid of it. Be careful not to make him wrong for this. You may even need to walk away from him with it to help him become curious. Now do this same exercise with the saddle.



Again, try to understand the prey-animal perspective and do some more of the *Driving Game*^{#3} and *Squeeze Game*^{#7}, sending him between you and the saddle, allowing him to find rest beside it. Repeat this until he finally accepts that it's a safe thing.

You'll find that on one of the squeezes he'll actually stop suddenly and make a big effort to smell it.



Saddling like a horseman

A savvy Horse-Man knows that the horse is making decisions every moment as to whether a human's intentions are good or bad, if he's safe or not, if you care or don't care. So they are conscious of every detailed action when in your presence.

Many relationships with horses are ruined by seemingly little things like barging into the horse's stall or personal space, or just tacking him up as if he's a piece of wood. Remember this is a living, breathing, thinking and emotional animal. If you are careless about the way you saddle him, he'll form an opinion about you as a leader... so don't make it an opinion you don't want him to have!

This is where introducing your equipment to the horse is important, as are things like not cross tying to force the horse to stand still.

Cross tying, or tying a horse short to saddle him is dangerous because horses are claustrophobic by nature and will sometimes pull back, even flip over when the girth or cinch is tightened. Most of us have learned to tie a horse for saddling because we could never get the horse to stand still.

Instead of tying your horse up, you'll learn to hang your lead rope over the crook of your arm and have at least three feet of slack in it for your horse's comfort and to give him

the responsibility of standing still. If he doesn't stand still, that's important feedback. It means you have not gotten him mentally and emotionally ready yet.

Seven Games first

Play *The Seven Games* first before you try to saddle your horse. You'll find out what side of the corral he woke up on, earn some respect, and get the relationship right before strapping the saddle on. Once you've been playing with your horse on the ground for a while and have introduced the saddle to him in one or more of those sessions, it will only take a few minutes and you can play the *Seven Games* between the pasture and the tack room if you like.

One reminder about approaching horses. Sometimes we get very direct line about "I'm going riding today" or "I bought horses so I can ride them" and what we must remember is that they are not motorbikes! Sometimes they don't feel like being ridden, or they are full of vim and vigor, or they decide to test your leadership. If you don't deal with these issues via creative use of the *Seven Games* you just might join the ranks of people who get frustrated, afraid and hurt with horses every day around the world. Take the time it takes to establish a positive relationship. Learn to think like a horse, learn to read horses and you'll be safer and enjoy your horse more... not to mention your horse enjoying you more!

With your saddle on the ground in front of your horse, stand with your back to your horse's shoulder and practice this little move.

Touch the saddle with the end of your lead rope, then turn and swing the end of the rope over his back in one big smooth move, like a hug.

Do it over and over and over until your horse is not in the least bothered by it and can stand calmly all the while. This is called desensitization. If your horse moves around, keep your rhythm going until he stops. Then stop and wait for him to lick his lips. This will teach him to find comfort by standing still.

If your horse moved away from the saddle, just start again where you are and once your horse can stand still for this, move closer to the saddle again.

If he is really bothered, stay with *The Friendly Game*^{#1} and toss your rope around and over his back with rhythm. This will better prepare him for the saddling technique.

Saddle Pad Friendly Game

Now do the same exercise with the saddle pad.

Sling it on with one hand, again starting with your back against your horse's shoulder: on and off, on and off, on

and off, over and over, until it means nothing to the horse. Watch for signs of acceptance like your horse lowering his head, licking his lips, and sighing.

Rub him all over with the saddle pad, sliding it up his neck and over his rump.



Once he's calm about it, settle the pad a little farther forward on the withers than where it needs to be.

Slide it back until it is in the right position so the hairs lie flat underneath, with the front of the pad being at the midpoint of the withers. Once you get the saddle on, you'll slide the whole thing back to sit where it should before cinching/girthing up.

Now for the saddle

Learn to place the saddle on your horse's back as softly as you would put a hat on your head. All too often, carelessly flung saddles land with a 'thump.' This only confirms the horse's negative perception of the saddle.

Let's change that perception!

Stand on the right side (you are going to saddle from the "off" side because it changes a pattern the horse is used to

and it allows you to make less moves in order to arrange your cinch/girth before fastening it). Again, start with your back to your horse's shoulder instead of facing your horse and lifting the saddle as you walk towards him which makes you look like a grizzly bear!

Rest the saddle on your left hip with your left hand holding the cantle (back of the saddle) and right hand supporting the front, under the front panel. Have your 12-foot *Line* draped over your right arm.

Swing the saddle back and forth (like a discus thrower would when winding up) until it builds enough momentum and becomes almost weightless, like it has a life of its own. If your horse is okay with this, move on. If not, make this another step in your saddling *Friendly Game*^{#1}.

Swivel on your right foot as you let the saddle carry this momentum in an upwards arc onto your horse's back (if you've done it right, you won't have to actually lift it up, it shouldn't take strength).

Once the saddle is in place, lift the pad up at the front so it gives relief to the withers and doesn't press down on it, and slide the saddle backwards until it settles into place. The first point of contact* of the saddle should be at least an inch behind the shoulder blades so as not to press on them.

**With western saddles that have a Wade Tree, which flares*

open at the front, the first point of contact is actually a few inches back from the front of the saddle where the gullet narrows. This is the part that should sit behind the shoulders. The flare actually should go over the shoulders so it positions the saddle horn over the withers.

Cinching or girthing up

As you pass in front of your horse from one side to the other, remember to do it politely. Place the back of your hand under his chin and yield his head toward you and past your shoulder so it 'magically' puts you on his other side.

When cinching up, do it in three stages and with feeling:

Draw the cinch up until it's snug enough to hold the saddle on but is not tight.

Back your horse with *The Yo-Yo Game*^{#4}, then play some *Circling Game*^{#5}, bring him in and tighten another notch.

Move him again with *Circling* and *Sideways*, then tighten it once more. You might even do a couple more circles to make sure your horse is comfortable and then you're ready to put your foot in the stirrup.

If your horse is bothered by the saddle, don't get on today! Play more games and especially use some challenges like jumping over things. Sometimes horses are bothered by

the cinch so you want to make sure they are through all of that before you mount.

Success tips

- ✓ Prior and proper preparation. Don't just throw the saddle on; make sure your horse is mentally and emotionally ready to be saddled. This is how you avoid mishaps.
- ✓ Swing your saddle on in a friendly way, like giving your horse a hug rather than approaching like a bear with it held up in front of you!
- ✓ Tighten your cinch in three stages, moving your horse around in between each one as opposed to pulling it tight in one move. Tightening the cinch/girth too quickly is a major cause of horses biting, kicking out, pulling back, blowing up their belly and even laying down when saddled.

Rather than think of it as a problem, take it as feedback and think about how much more considerately you can saddle your horse.

Pitfalls

- 💣 *Not playing some or all of The Seven Games before saddling*, even if it's only two minutes worth. The point is to play with your horse until he's in the mood, otherwise you're going to have problems, often called vices or resistances.
- 💣 *Tying your horse up to saddle him*. This is dangerous because of the horse's claustrophobic nature. Teach your horse to stand still so you can hang the lead rope over your arm.
- 💣 *Cinching up too tightly at first*. Be considerate. Do it with feeling and in three stages.

Troubleshooting

- ☹️ *Your horse tries to bite or kick at you when you go to cinch him up.*
- 😊 *Too much pressure, too quickly, too tightly is bound to cause negative reactions from your horse.*

Don't punish your horse for these reactions. It's not his fault and he's not being a bad horse. He's giving you feedback! Be more polite, more considerate, and if this has been a problem for a long time it may take a little while to go away when starting to saddle in this new way. If you have a horse who is usually very aggravated

by saddling, it may be necessary to further desensitize him in the following way:

Use simulations for the cinch: tie a soft rope around his girth area while you play the *Seven Games*. Two *Savvy Strings* joined together is ideal for this.

Start with it a little loose but snug enough not to slip off, and keep tightening it, little by little, over the span of about five minutes. Sending your horse up and down hills and over little jumps and logs can help a lot too. If he needs to buck, that's okay. Just hold the end of the 12-foot *Line* and don't lose control of his nose. Let him do what he needs to do until the string doesn't bother him anymore and then repeat this for seven sessions in a row. One time is not enough to change a long standing pattern. While seven times won't "cure" every case it will help make a significant change which you can then continue to build upon.

Repetition: Swing your saddle up when your horse is ready and then desensitize him with the cinch/girth itself. Snug it up and release, up and release, up and release over and over until your horse stops reacting. You won't actually connect it, just experiment with getting firmer and firmer and then lighten up again, so at one point it will be a bit uncomfortable and then back off again.

Friendly Game#1: The underside of *Zone 3* needs a lot of it with your *Carrot Stick* and once your horse is safe, start caressing and rubbing with your hands, look for itchy spots, etc.

Be prepared to take time getting your horse right with this. It will pay off with safer riding through a happier and more accepting horse.

☹ *Your horse often humps or bucks when first saddled.*

☺ This is sometimes called "cold backed" and can be related to emotional rejection of the saddle and or cinch, or the feeling of claustrophobia. It's natural for horses to react when gripped around their middle. That's how they've survived for thousands of years... by bucking predators off! It is also wise to check that there is nothing physically upsetting him. Look for burrs in the saddle pad, screws coming through the base of your saddle, or the saddle pressing on or up against his shoulder blades (scapula).

Don't try to stop your horse bucking. Help him get through it by sending him around, moving him out, even sending him over a jump. This will help him get used to the feel of the saddle and cinch. If he needs to buck, that's okay but don't stand there and watch, get him into motion with *The Circling Game#5*. The more a

horse goes forward the harder it is for him to buck. Remember, you'll make the safest bucking horse rides while you remain on the ground! Every time you saddle up you're going to make it a habit to be sure your horse is well and truly over bucking before you put a foot in the stirrup. Put *Games 4, 5, 6 and 7* to good use. They are your 'pre-flight check.'

Lesson 14 Check List

- ☐ Your horse goes willingly to the saddle and stands next to it when you send him with *The Driving Game*^{#3}. Even better, he is confident enough to smell it.
- ☐ He stands still for saddling and you can saddle without tying him, the rope just draped loosely over your arm at the elbow.
- ☐ Your horse accepts cinching and you have a new habit, to do it in three stages, moving him around in between each stage.

Success Map

Place a check mark on your *Success Map* to indicate you have completed *Lesson 14*.

Lesson 15: Lateral flexion and tossing the rein over your horse's head from the ground

Introduction

Pat teaches people to ride with one rein to learn how to control their horse effectively, and to break the habit of pulling back on two reins in an "Oh no!" situation. The best way to teach this was to take one rein away because people would think they were using one rein but in fact still be pulling on two! Believe it or not, one rein is much safer and gives you much more control.

Before you saddle your horse, mount and ride with one rein, there are two tasks you will need to teach your horse – to bend his neck in *Lateral Flexion* and to be calm and confident when you toss the rein over his head.

If you can bend your horse's neck to one side, you can control him because it disempowers his hindquarters. Pulling on two reins actually empowers the hindquarters which gives him more power to run off with you if that's what he intends.

One rein riding requires that you can control and guide your horse left and right by tossing the rein over his head. It

also begins the process of developing an independent seat, where any movements with your arms and hands do not affect your seat.

In this lesson you will first teach your horse lateral flexion and rein tossing from the ground.

Objectives

- ★ To teach your horse to calmly bend his neck to one side (Lateral Flexion) while standing in *Zone 3*, the same zone as if you were sitting on him.
- ★ To find comfort there and have Lateral Flexion become a cue to relax.
- ★ To teach your horse to be relaxed and not react when the rope is tossed over his head and passes in front of his nose.

Tools



Halter and 12-foot Line.

Although not necessary, it's fine if your horse is already saddled for this session if you have come from *Lesson 14* or plan today to start *Lesson 16*.

IMPORTANT: Please DO NOT USE a leather halter, a webbed halter, or any other regular halter for these

techniques especially when it comes to riding as they are not safe. Regular halters encourage a horse to push against them which many of you have discovered by just trying to lead your horse with one! The Parelli *Horseman's Halter* is designed to be soft on the horse's nose, yet discourage leaning.

Also, a regular lead rope will irritate your hands unlike the 12-foot Line that is smooth and is specifically designed to flow through your hands instead of be grabbed hard and fast. This will be important for the technique you are about to learn.

Directions

Lateral Flexion from the ground

Teaching your horse lateral flexion from the ground first will prepare him for when you ask for this same yield when on his back.

Stand in *Zone 3*. Using your rope, draw your horse's head around to you using a hand-over-hand technique allowing the rope to slip. It's like combing the rope rather than a fixed pull. Do this until your horse starts to turn his head to you and as soon as he does, open your hands instantly and stop the motion. Build it slowly until your horse will finally turn his head to you without concern. At first your horse

may also move his feet (*more on this in Troubleshooting*).

This task is an expansion of your *Porcupine Game*^{#2}, teaching your horse to yield from the feel of steady pressure. This is what you want to be THINKING if your horse finds this task a challenge. It may take several small sessions before your horse is able to give Lateral Flexion and automatically relaxes. You will build the relaxation part.

Be sure to practice this on both sides of your horse. One side may be more difficult than the other, so just take the time it takes until your horse understands that bending his head to you is what you are asking.



Tossing the rein over your horse's head from the ground

This task will help your horse become comfortable with the rope passing over his head from one side to the other. You will be using this when you ride with one rein later in the Program.

Stand in *Zone 3* and throw the rope over his head (from where you are standing) to the other side.

This task is an expansion of *The Friendly Game*^{#1} and remember that rhythm, relaxation and retreat are important features of *The Friendly Game*^{#1}. Use a few approach and retreat swings before tossing it all the way over. This helps your horse anticipate what is coming. If he can tolerate this you can go ahead, otherwise stay right there until he is ready. Keep this in mind as you are teaching him.

Throw the rein back and forth a few times until it doesn't bother him. When you eventually get to do this from the saddle it's important to make certain your horse has no concern whatsoever for the rein passing close in front of his face, or even hitting him on the nose and ears – because invariably that will happen!

You can also swing the rope while standing out in front of him. When he then becomes comfortable with this, you can then go back to standing in *Zone 3*.



Once your horse can do these tasks willingly, it will be time to mount. And that is exactly what you'll be doing in *Lesson 16*!

Troubleshooting

-  Your horse can't stand still when you ask for lateral flexion from the ground.
-  Rather than try to stop him from moving, just ignore it and drift with him as you continue. Most important of all, release or stop what you're doing the moment he stops moving his feet. If you can do this, your horse will learn to stand still pretty quickly. Try not to release when he is moving his feet... it's when you release that the horse is motivated and thinks he's right.

The same applies for when you toss the rope over his head.

Lesson 15 Check List

- ☐ Your horse will give you lateral flexion from the ground without moving his feet and without fighting the feel from your hands.
- ☐ You can ask for lateral flexion to both right and left and he'll turn his head willingly each way.
- ☐ You can teach him to hold lateral flexion for the count of five, feet not moving before you release him.
- ☐ You can toss the rein over your horse's head while you stand in *Zone 3* and *Zone 1* and your horse is calm and confident, doesn't move his feet.

Success Map

Place a check mark on your *Success Map* indicating that you have completed the tasks in *Lesson 15*.

Lesson 16: Mounting and Dismounting

Introduction

Develop good habits for safety's sake!

Note: Even though we have made separate lessons of them to ensure we cover the details for each task and idea, you can and should do both *Lesson 16* and *17* at the same time!

Objective

- ★ To know how to mount and dismount safely.

Tools

 Halter, 12-foot Line, Saddle, and Saddle Pad.

Directions

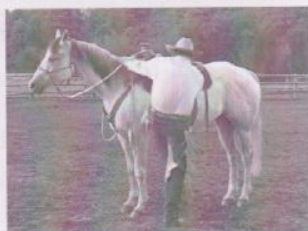
Rock the pommel or saddle horn from side-to-side and

try to unbalance your horse. This will cause him to spread his front feet to the point that you can't pull him off balance when you step up in the stirrup.

Hold the rein and mane together in one hand on the side you are mounting. Hold the rein short but without it being tight.

You don't want too tight a rein or it will bend his neck and he'll be inclined to move his back feet around as you try to step up.

Face your horse's tail. This is especially important if you have a tall horse. It puts you in a great position to use the rein to stop him drifting yet keep him straight. If you are behind the stirrup and your horse moves, you'll end up bending his neck and moving his hindquarters just because of your position.



Reach for the stirrup with your other hand and put your foot in it.

Take a hold of the pommel/horn and hop around until you are beside your horse in *Zone 3* and can look him in the eye. In this way you can read your horse's mental and

emotional state before going any further. If he's wide-eyed and scared-looking, don't get on!

Bounce up and down a couple of times and if he can stand still, step up in the stirrup and wait there a moment. If not, bouncing up and down will be a new *Friendly Game!*

Point your belly button squarely at your horse's ears and position your hips parallel with your horse's shoulders and try to actually sit partially in the seat of the saddle – this is a VERY secure position when you find it. Even if your horse moves, you'll find you can drift with him and not lose your balance.

You are testing your cinch and watching for your horse's reaction. If his eye gets frightened and rimmed with white, go no further. Step down and be friendly, then start again and repeat as often as necessary.

Step up and down like this several times to teach your horse to stand still. Once he can, go on to the next step.



Note: If you have a really tall horse or have some physical challenges, stand on a log or long step that elevates your height but still allows you to use the stirrup to teach your horse to be okay with the procedure.

Reach over and rub his shoulder to 'ask permission' to get on.

If he has trouble with this, don't proceed, go back to the previous step and start again.

Swing your leg over and settle gently into the saddle.

Put your foot in your other stirrup, preferably without looking.

Note:

 Many stirrup fenders on western saddles are badly designed; they lie flat against the horse's side instead of sitting at right angles. When your stirrups sit at right angles it helps you find your stirrup easily and prevents knee and ankle strain. It also allows you to drape your legs more naturally around the horse when you're riding. There are several products on the market that can solve this "fender" problem. Check www.parellicollection.com if you need some help.

Sit there for a little while, like to the count of 20. Be Friendly! Don't go anywhere. This teaches your horse to

stand still and be patient. This needs to become one of those good, savvy habits... like everything else you've been learning!

Now step off again. This is not about riding yet and you need to install the habit of getting off as easily as you get on. Most riders never think of getting off until the end of the ride and this can pose dangerous problems. For example, when a horse starts getting overexcited or afraid, most riders think they have to stay on no matter what, when in fact the safest thing to do is get off... immediately. Getting on and getting off, over and over again as a drill at this stage is one of the safest things you can develop as a habit.

Dismounting

Hold the rein and the mane on the same side as you plan to get off.

Drop your foot out of the outside stirrup, lift your leg over so you are in the same position as when mounting standing in one stirrup with your bellybutton and hips facing your horse's ears (see bottom photo on page 27), hesitate to make sure your horse is settled and ready, then drop your foot out of the stirrup and slide off without fuss, smoothly and cleanly and rub your horse.

Success tips

- ✓ Saddling and mounting is a form of *The Friendly Game*^{#1}.
- ✓ Prepare your horse with some or all of the *Seven Games* until he is left brain and thus mentally, emotionally and physically ready to be mounted. Too many people just get on a horse who is fidgeting and moving around, when in fact this is a sign that the horse is not comfortable with the idea. This spells UN-safe.
- ✓ Rock your horse from side-to-side until his feet are spread and balanced.
- ✓ Look your horse in the eye. Read him the whole time.
- ✓ Learn to be athletic when you mount. Don't drag yourself up. Spring up and try to be weightless, getting your seat into the saddle. Turning your hips will center your weight somewhat as opposed to putting all your weight into the stirrup... which puts more strain on your horse.
- ✓ Point your belly button forward towards your horse's eye and not across the saddle.
- ✓ Hesitate before you swing your leg over. Ask permission by rubbing his opposite shoulder.
- ✓ Once you're on, just sit there for a little bit. Don't move off straight away or you'll teach your horse the habit of

moving as soon as you mount.

- ✓ Prepare your horse and yourself for dismounting by arranging your reins and letting go of your outside stirrup and waiting until he's standing still (if you can). Don't just jump off unless it's an emergency... in which case try to bend his neck first.
- ✓ Learn to mount and dismount equally well from both sides! It's a really good idea both physically for your horse's sake, and for your athletic development.

Pitfalls

-  *Just saddling up and getting on.* This is asking for trouble one day. So often, people ignore the signs that things are going to go wrong, things like: won't stand still to saddle; won't stand still to get on. Always prepare your horse with savvy. Remember, it's all about prevention.
-  *Not rocking your horse by the saddle horn or pommel before you mount.* Teach your horse to spread his front legs in readiness to take your weight on one stirrup.
-  *A tight, untrusting rein and awkwardly bent neck while mounting.*
-  *Flopping or slamming into the saddle when you mount.* Settle in with grace and consideration for your horse's back.

 Too loose a rein when mounting or dismounting. Have a short rein but not a tight rein, so you can bend your horse's neck to you if something goes wrong: the lateral flexion control rein is very powerful when it comes to safety.

Troubleshooting

-  You've tightened your cinch in three steps, but it's still too loose when you step into the stirrup.
-  Get off and tighten it. Whatever you do, don't hurry up and get on... that would be like sprinting up the jetty to jump onto a sinking ship!
-  Your horse tries to bite you when you go to mount.
-  This can be either a disrespectful or self-defensive move. Chances are your horse has been impolitely approached in the past and it's been an unpleasant experience.

There are two things you can do:

1. Be more polite from now on. Follow the procedure in this lesson and this alone can change things.
2. When he does try to nip, don't slap him for it or he'll turn it into a game of how quickly he can get in, bite, and get out of the way! Instead, smile and pet him, or present him with a carrot when he swings his head

around to bite! This will adjust his attitude pretty dramatically so he sees mounting as more pleasant than he previously thought. You can also use a rhythmic block by flapping your elbow to discourage it. Try to decide which your horse needs... is he afraid and distrusting or more naughty by nature? This should be determined by his nature in all other areas, not just mounting.

-  Your horse won't stand still to saddle or mount.
-  This means he needs more preparation, respect and desensitization through the *Seven Games*. Do not ignore these signs! They are very important when it comes to safety. Your horse is telling you he's not ready, so don't just charge on. Pay attention and backtrack to get everything okay.

Here are some examples of desensitization.

For saddling preparation use a lot of repetitive simulations such as tossing the rope over his back, flopping the saddle pad on and off, rubbing him with the saddle pad, sending him to the saddle via *The Driving Game*^{#3}, etc. Do it until your horse is calm and left brain and there is no more nervous or disrespectful behavior. You have to be more persistent than he is. If you take the perspective that you've never seen it take longer than two days, then when it takes only ten or

twenty minutes, it will seem short.

In desensitizing your horse to mounting there are a couple of different situations: one is when you go to put your foot in the stirrup and he won't let you; the other is when you want to bounce a couple of times before you spring up. Think about which movement is upsetting the horse and then do a lot of repetition of this with approach and retreat.

For example, lift your foot toward the stirrup and back down, over and over and over, until it ceases to bother your horse. Use the same repetition for bouncing once your foot is in the stirrup (and make sure you are fit enough for this!). You need to be able to hop up and down until your horse stands still. The moment he does, stop. Pet him.

Then start again. Take the time it takes to do it right the first time and it will probably never happen again, or each subsequent time it does, it takes a fraction of the time to reassure him.

☹️ *You have trouble mounting – your horse is tall or you are too un-fit!*

😊 Even if your horse is tall, it is still possible to learn to mount without a mounting block. The secret is to use simulation (see 'unfit' solution below) to improve your

athletic ability, and as you get better, to gradually use lower and lower mounting blocks.

If you are too unfit, you will need to work on yourself to get fitter! Practice mounting by stepping up on a fence or a chair, making sure you can hold on to something while you do it. (Medical issues are another area. Just be sure your horse is still desensitized in all the right areas so you are not breezing past all the mounting drills. Do them as best you can and with any simulation you can think of... maybe even a friend doing it for you.)

Build mounting strength in both your legs. Give yourself greater and greater challenges to keep improving your ability.

Pay attention to your thoughts and your focus when you mount. Instead of anticipating a struggle, imagine yourself to be "weightless" as you spring up. Where is your focus when you mount? On the ground with your eyes looking down at the saddle or your leg? Or, is it up toward the sky? (Even though I advise you to watch your horse's eye when you mount you can be mentally projecting your body toward the sky.) Give a couple of good bounces before you spring up.

Learn to put as little weight in the stirrup as possible. This will also help if your horse is fat or round which causes the saddle to slip (no matter how tight the cinch).

The Emergency Dismount

Objective

- ★ How to get off in an emergency, in a hurry and teach your horse to turn and face you... as a habit.

Tools

-  Horseman's Halter, 12-foot Line, saddle and pad.

Directions

First practice getting off when your horse is stopped: bend him in Lateral Flexion then dismount on the same side you've bent your horse. Do this until you can get off quickly and easily while keeping hold of the inside rein.

Next, progress to bending your horse at a walk and quickly getting off as soon as he's stopped. One day you will be able to do this at the trot, and at higher levels, the canter. Note: Don't jump off until he's stopped or almost stopped... this is not about jumping off at a dead run!

Now teach your horse to face you: Jump off and walk backwards in a straight line, keeping hold of the rein. As you walk backwards, the rein will bring his head towards you, turning him. As you pass his rump, give it a short tap with your hand (not too hard) to help move it away. When he faces you, stop, relax and stroke him.

Now combine all the elements: bend and get off from a walk, or trot. As you walk backwards, tap his rump and then stroke him when he faces you. Pretty soon your horse will automatically turn and face you as soon as you jump down.

Once you've got all these elements solidly in place it's time to speed the whole thing up. Get off quickly and move backwards quickly! Repeat this until the whole exercise starts to feel easy and your horse turns before you can tap his rump.

Success Tips

- ✓ Slow and right beats fast and wrong. Be successful at the halt and walk before going faster.
- ✓ Don't jump off until your horse is bent and stopped or almost stopped.
- ✓ Bend before you do anything else!
- ✓ Repeat until your horse learns the pattern... You bend: he slows or stops. You jump off: he turns to face you.

Pitfalls

-  Getting off before your horse has stopped or at least slowed down. If you try to get off while he's still running or before his neck is bent, the inertia of motion will cause you to fall over and hurt yourself.

You're moving but the ground is not! The whole idea of this exercise is to know what to do in an emergency and to do it automatically, without thinking, because there's no time to think when things go wrong!

💣 *Getting off the wrong side*, the "outside" of your horse instead of the "inside," the side he's bent to. If you get off the outside, the chances of the horse turning his rump to you are very strong... you don't want this!

💣 *Not doing it often enough*, until it becomes a programmed response. This is when your horse will be solid... when it's become his 'program' to respond to you in a pattern that he's come to know. Horses are great pattern learners.

Lesson 16 Check List

- ☐ You can step up and down in the stirrup three times on both sides (or you are working on a program to develop the ability to do so!).
- ☐ Your horse stands still while you mount without you holding the rein tight.
- ☐ Your horse can stand still for the count of 20 after you've settled into the saddle.
- ☐ You can make an emergency dismount from a trot – bend, slow, jump off – and have your horse immediately turn and face you.

Success Map

Place a check mark on your *Success Map* indicating you have completed the tasks for *Lesson 16*.

Lesson 17: Lateral flexion and tossing the rein over your horse's head from the saddle

Introduction

Testing lateral flexion before moving off, is like checking the brakes before you ride. It is a neutral, control rein position. Here's a very important saying to commit to your automatic memory: "One rein for control, two reins for communication."

As was noted in *Lesson 15*, if you can bend your horse's head to one side, you can control him because it disengages his hindquarters to stop him from doing things like running off, bucking or rearing up.

Pulling on two reins, on the other hand, makes a horse stronger and gives him more power to run off, buck or rear with you, if that's his intention. Now that you are getting in the saddle this becomes a very important thing to know.

You have already taught your horse these two tasks from

the ground so be certain to do these tasks from the ground as part of your warm up for this next lesson.

Objectives

When mounted:

- ★ To teach your horse to calmly give you lateral flexion and bring his head around to your foot.
- ★ To find comfort there and have it become a cue to relax.
- ★ To teach your horse to be non-reactive when you toss the rein over his head from the saddle.

Tools

 Halter and 12-foot Line, horse saddled, small corral.

Directions

For this lesson, have your horse saddled and take him into a small area, a round corral or a small yard.

Prepare your horse with creative tasks using the *Seven Games*. Include lateral flexion and tossing the rope over his head from the ground. Do not even think of getting on until he is done leaping, bucking and playing, is left brain, paying attention to you and does what you ask without resistance. Only then is he properly prepared to accept you on his back.

Mount your horse using the mounting drill learned in

Lesson 16. Stay in the confined area; it's much safer than in an open area at this time.

Focus on your horse's eye or lips. This will help you be in a balanced position for when he bends his neck in lateral flexion.

Ask for lateral flexion from your horse's back.

Just as you did on the ground, start combing the rope with your hands, in the direction of the front of your thigh, just above your knee (as opposed to behind your leg). Draw the rope gradually shorter as your horse begins lateral flexion and then comes all the way around to your foot... as if he was going to smell your foot.

Don't trap his head there. Allow him to straighten his neck out again if he needs to (he may even lick his lips), pause and then begin again. This is called approach and retreat and helps your horse to feel safe with his head brought all the way around to your foot. Repeat



this several times until the point that your horse has no hesitation about giving you lateral flexion.

Toss the rope over his head so it goes to the other side.

In doing this you are also practicing your independent seat. It's natural for our legs and 'cheeks' to tighten when we do things like throw the rope over our horse's head.

Learn to do this without it affecting your seat and legs.

Teach your arms to move independently of your seat.

You might want to practice this first while sitting on a fence. Notice if your muscles tighten in your seat or legs when you do it.

Ask for lateral flexion now on the other side.

Once your horse flexes willingly, after some practice over a few sessions, you can then ask for lateral flexion with one hand: Lift the rope up with the hand that's on the opposite side of the rope. For example, if your rope is on the left side of your horse, you'd lift it with your right hand. This leaves your left hand free to slide down the rope to ask for the lateral flexion.

Slide your hand down the rope about half way, close your fingers one by one without moving your hand backwards. Each finger will apply a little more pressure or "feel" to the halter.

At the same time, put your other hand on the top of the saddle horn, or pommel, to form a "power position."

This will help you stay balanced and firmly planted in your seat, and is an important technique to build on in the next lesson.

Bring your hand slowly towards the front of your thigh which asks your horse to follow the feel and give you lateral flexion. If your horse resists at any point, wait and don't pull any harder. You may even have to release and start again. Above all, don't fight with your horse or try to overpower him during these learning stages.

Success tips

- ✓ Take your time. Don't hurry your horse.
- ✓ Think of teaching him to 'smell your foot' so you don't resort to force to make him bend.
- ✓ Release every time your horse tries to follow the feel at first. This will cause him to try harder.
- ✓ When using the hand over hand technique, keep your hands slipping on the rope, as if it is covered in oil. Don't get into a contest of strength.
- ✓ If it's not working when on your horse's back, go back to the ground and get it better there first. Check also that you are not gripping with your legs as you do it.

This could also cause your horse to be reluctant to flex.

- ✓ Position your hands so they are drawing to the front of your thigh, not behind it.
- ✓ Use this one rein, neutral, lateral flexion position in an "Oh no!" situation to regain control. Once he's learned the concept you can bend him and hold him there until he's relaxed.
- ✓ Use the "power position" with your other hand, push firmly on the saddle horn/pommel. The more your horse resists in an "Oh no!" situation, the more you will need this power position. It also stops you gripping with your legs... they can just hang loose and relaxed.

Pitfalls

- ✿ *Not teaching your horse the concept on the ground first.*
- ✿ *Rudely pulling his head around and trying to hold it there.* Remember that you are teaching him, and that this is a vulnerable position for a prey animal. Don't forget to consider your horse's point of view.
- ✿ *Bringing your hand behind your leg.* Keep your hand in front of your thigh when drawing the rein in for lateral flexion. When it goes behind your thigh it changes the whole dynamic and is more likely to spin your horse around rather than disengage the hindquarters.

Troubleshooting

- ☹ *Your horse turns his head the other way.*
- 😊 Don't worry. Keep asking for the bend and as soon as he tries an inch in that direction, release. It will come quicker the next time. If you fight your horse you could get hurt; horses can throw themselves over in panic. This is not about forcing the horse, it's about teaching him to bend and to feel safe and relaxed when doing so. This is also why we teach you to let the rope slip through your hands and not to grab tight and pull. The horse is a claustrophobic animal so this will become a skill for him to learn and understand.

Consider the horse's point of view. He knows that if he bends his neck around he can't run away. No wonder he's skeptical! Understand this and teach him that it's safe. He'll grow emotionally calmer.

Some people think their horse is physically incapable of lateral flexion because he's so resistant. Test this by offering him a carrot while standing in *Zone 3*. That will tell you! Most of the time, it's an emotional resistance that is understandable for a prey animal. We've seen people give up trying to teach their horse to bend, and after they leave the horse reaches around and scratches his hip! Still, in the remote case of it being a physical inability for the horse, this is a very good reason for you

not to force him, and to ask just a little each time and build on that.

☹️ *Your horse can't stand still when you do this.*

😊 That's okay. Remember it's just prey animal insecurity.

Allow his feet to move and persist until his feet stop.

Pretty soon he'll be able to do this without moving his feet. Just don't be impatient or try to stop him.

Only release when he stops.

Another thing to check is that your legs and seat might be squeezing him at the same time. Try to sit like a sack of potatoes (hard for equitation experts!) so your "energy or life" is absolutely switched off and you are not accidentally pushing on the gas pedal.

☹️ *Your horse won't keep his head there, he keeps jerking it back.*

😊 That's okay too. Allow the rope to slip easily through your hands and don't restrict his need to 'escape' as that will only panic him. Consider how vulnerable a position this is for your horse. Just reassure him and gently, patiently start over. Again, you might consider getting it better from the ground first... it's the safest place for you both.

Lesson 17 Check List

When mounted:

- ☐ Your horse will bend his neck and give you lateral flexion, without moving his feet and without fighting the feel from your hands.
- ☐ You can ask for lateral flexion to both right and left and he'll turn his head equally willingly each way.
- ☐ You can teach him to hold his head position like that for the count of five, hands soft on the rope, until you release him.
- ☐ Your horse understands the concept of lateral flexion so well now that you can simply slide your hand down the rein to shorten it, close your fingers slowly, bring your hand toward the front of your thigh, and he flexes laterally. It's the one-handed technique now.
- ☐ You automatically bring your free hand into the power position on the front of your saddle.
- ☐ You can toss the rope over your horse's head while he stands still and relaxed.

Success Map

Place a check mark on your *Success Map* to indicate you have completed the tasks for *Lesson 17*.

You're ready to move on to Pocket Guide 7!